

# **Birches Head Academy – Creating a Reading School**

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**Submitted – Farshore 2021 RfP - Whole School Award**

## **Context**

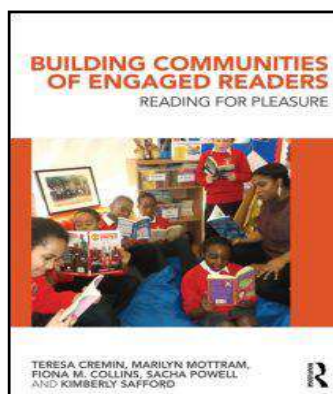
Birches Head Academy is an 11-16 co-educational school with a rapidly-growing cohort of almost 900 pupils, including a large number of EAL students. Situated in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent, the academy is part of the Frank Field Trust of schools.

Forming a key part of our School Improvement Plan, literacy (and, as an extension of this, reading for pleasure) form the thread that ties each and every lesson in the school together. We believe that, by creating a solid and tangible reading for pleasure culture, we will enhance students' cultural capital and help them to reach their potential academically, socially and emotionally.

This is particularly vital in Stoke-on-Trent, which sees above average levels of deprivation, unemployment and low academic achievement.

## **OU Research inspiration and rationale**

After extensive research and professional development into the importance of reading for pleasure, it was decided in 2020 to develop a coherent and robust reading for pleasure strategy within the school. We looked at and took inspiration from the OU's findings and chose to focus on developing our reading for pleasure pedagogy, not only in the library, but also filtering out to the wider school community.



We also looked extensively at research from the Schools Library Association, including their recent publication 'Get Everyone Reading.'

## **Aims**

We decided to focus on the following elements in order to consolidate our reading for pleasure strategy:

- Ensuring access to an attractive, calm library with up-to-date texts and a wide variety of resources
- Developing our Accelerated Reader programme in order for it to work to its full potential

-Developing a wide range of extra-curricular activities and events to support reading for pleasure

-Including students' opinions and recommendations for the library and the books, in order to give them ownership over the space and the resources

## Outline

### **Library Refurbishment:**

Beginning in Summer 2020, the library underwent a complete refurbishment, in order to bring it up-to-date and make it a place that the students feel proud of and want to take care of. The students are fiercely proud of their new library and it is always commented on by visitors to the school as a welcoming and airy space.





### **Intensive Reading Courses:**

From their reading tests, we have identified a number of Year 7 students who are now benefitting from some extra help with their reading. As a result, these students are taking an 'intensive reading course,' in which they read with a member of staff (some are

administration staff who enjoy having contact with the students that they would not otherwise have) every day during form-time for a week. Once the week is over, the students are tracked to ensure they have carried on reading at home. As a direct result of this, several of these students now choose to use the library during their free time to complete extra reading, for the sheer enjoyment of it.

### **National Reading Champions Quiz:**



A team of students took part in this year's National Literacy Trust quiz. We were delighted to be placed just outside the top 10 on the leader-board, out of dozens of schools all over the West Midlands (including several independent and selective grammar schools). There was a real buzz around the day, with lots of posts on our Facebook page and encouragement from students and staff.

### **World Book Night**



To celebrate WBN, our Librarian read an extract from the book 'Malamander' to the Y8 Library Club. The video was then posted to Teams, where other students logged on during the designated 'Reading Hour' that evening and commented once they had watched it.

### **Student Voice**

Students are consulted about the types of books they would like to see in the library, and these recommendations are taken into account when ordering new resources. This means that the books remain relevant, up-to-date and from a wide range of genres.



### **Stoke It Up!**

We are proud to be taking part in the city-wide initiative 'Stoke It Up!', which aims to get Year 7 students in Stoke-on-Trent to read 1 billion words collectively. We have created displays on the theme of pirates, adventure and quests in order to encourage students to read texts they might not otherwise have considered.







**English Excellence Partnership Stoke** @EEPStoke · 14h

What better way to welcome back Year 7 students, than with this treasure chest full of lovely adventure themed books from @birchesheadhigh 📖

We look forward to seeing our schools continue to 'Stoke it up!' now all the students are back in school! 📖



### **World Book Day and National Storytelling Week**

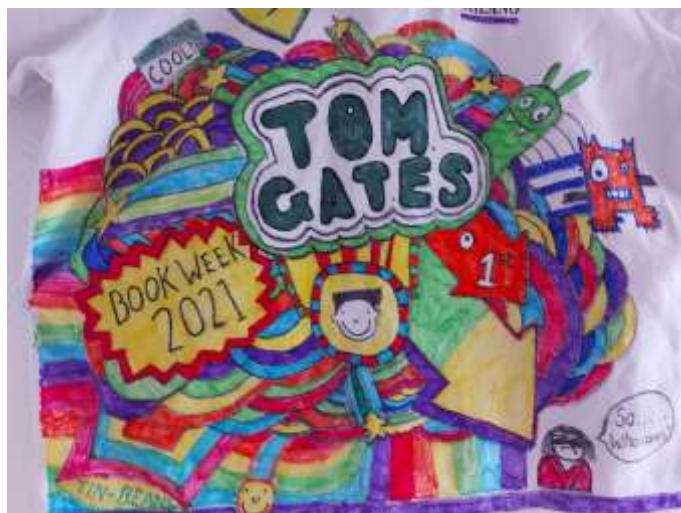
Despite being in lockdown, we still put on a wealth of activities for the students to take part in for WBD and NSW. In all, over 80 students enthusiastically participated, and we ended WBD by encouraging students to say 'Happy World Book Day' in their native languages. The students even got to work remotely with author Sarah Oliver for the day.



**A still-shot from the football story that was read to students by professional footballer Josh Gordon.**



We put together a menu of activities for students to take part in throughout the week.



An example of the t-shirt one student was inspired to create on World Book Day.





Students enjoyed sharing their 'home libraries' with us on World Book Day.

### **Accelerated Reader as a tool for Reading for Pleasure**

We use A.R. effectively with our KS3 students. In order to encourage them to read widely and voraciously, we offer prizes to students who score 100% in 3, 5 and 10 quizzes. We also offer a pizza party to the class with the highest number of 100% quiz passes at the end of each term. Here is an example of some of the prizes:



### **Birches Head Reads**

We run a scheme called Birches Head Reads, in which students are given a booklet of 100 books. They tick off each book they read, and those with the most read by the end of the school year earn themselves a fun trip out of school.

### **Lockdown and Reading for Pleasure**

Here are some of the many ways we encourage reading for pleasure whilst the school was closed during lockdown:

## Ways to read at home

### E-books

[barnesandnoble.com/b/free-ebooks/kids/\\_/N-ry02bu1](https://barnesandnoble.com/b/free-ebooks/kids/_/N-ry02bu1)  
Barnes and Noble list thousands of free ebooks

[marvel.com/comics/list/623/age\\_started\\_with\\_free\\_issues](https://marvel.com/comics/list/623/age_started_with_free_issues)  
Marvel offer free access to some of their graphic novels

[gseawaystotheclassics.com](https://gseawaystotheclassics.com)  
Classic literature to read online for free

[magickeys.com/books](https://magickeys.com/books)  
Free ebooks for children of all ages

[library.thenationalacademy](https://library.thenationalacademy)  
Access the free e-library from the Oak National Academy

### Audio books

Listen to a Roald Dahl audiobook and read along at the same time – Search [Lewis Kirk Roald Dahl](#)  
Children's author Michael Rosen reads his poems and stories aloud  
[Michael Rosen](#)  
[stories.audible.com](https://stories.audible.com) - lots of free audiobooks for all ages to enjoy whilst schools are closed

Listen to Mrs. Sanders reading stories on the BHA Library Teams page

Pick a book up from main reception – message Mrs. Sanders on Teams for book choices

Use your Stoke-on-Trent Libraries membership (or join for free today!) to download e-books and audiobooks for free. They are also offering a click, call and collect service on their books – google [Stoke libraries click and collect](#)

For Year 7 students, try [oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/](https://oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/) for free e-books and [booksfortopics.com/storytime-online](https://booksfortopics.com/storytime-online) for storytime sessions

Don't forget to complete an Accelerated Reader quiz each time you finish a book. If the book is not on AR, contact Mrs. Sanders and you can complete a short book review instead

During lockdown, we created a 'virtual library' on Teams, allowing students to access e-books/audiobooks from home. Students were given the opportunity to listen to members of staff reading stories aloud. We created a loaning system, whereby students could request a library book to be left at main reception for them, and this was well-used by students from Y7 up to Y11.

The Librarian was nominated by a Y8 student as a Lockdown Hero in the Pearson National Teaching Awards for her work on outstanding wellbeing support whilst the school was closed. The student stated the nomination was “for supporting my love of books.”

## Library Lessons and Reading for Pleasure

An example of a way which reading for pleasure is nurtured is during the weekly Library Lessons for KS3. In this particular activity, the Librarian read aloud some C.S. Lewis and we used this as a springboard for students' further reading into the books if they so wished (which many did).



## Extra-Curricular Clubs:

Our KS3 Library Clubs take place weekly after school. Students are able to chat about reading, try new titles and authors and complete extra Accelerated Reader quizzes. The clubs are well-attended (with 21 regular members).

### **Whole-School Reads:**

Each week, an extract from a book or a short story is selected to be read by students, staff and parents. The idea is for everyone to be reading the same thing at the same time, sparking discussion and creating the opportunity for discovering exciting new texts.

## **Impact**

-Our library environment and reading opportunities, competitions, events and activities are regularly commented upon by visitors.

-Students are reading and enjoying a wider range of texts, as demonstrated by our Accelerated Reader figures (almost 1000 quizzes taken this school year so far, with 82% of those achieving good or excellent pass rates).

-Students read for a minimum of 20 minutes a day, which is tracked through their reading logs and takes into account the Nagy&Herman 1987 study into how reading impacts a child's academic success.

-Reading ages have increased across the board by an average of 3 months since September, despite lockdown.

-Students value their library and their reading for pleasure like never before:

“We have numerous notifications about interesting books. Mrs Sanders is interested in what we would like to read.”

“We know to cherish our love of reading because of the amazing opportunities that Mrs Sanders gives us.”

“Every book is a winding road. You go on a journey that has twists and bumps.”

## **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice and Next Steps:**

The research we have considered as part of our RfP Strategy has meant that we have been able to focus our attentions on the areas most needed. This has seen us achieve the maximum impact on students' attitudes to, and opportunities for, reading for pleasure.

**Next Steps:**

- Create a 'cosy' reading corner through the use of beanbag chairs and cushions.**
- Develop the use of Accelerated Reader to increase reading ages.**
- Develop the non-fiction section of the Library as a vehicle for reading for pleasure.**
- Take part in annual Readathons, the first of which is in May.**